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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MONTENEGRO: OPPOSITION LEADER BULATOVIC BETWEEN  
SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

Ref: A) Belgrade 860 B) 05 Belgrade 2185 C) Belgrade 400

¶1. (SBU) Predrag Bulatovic, leader of the civic-oriented opposition Socialist People's Party (SNP), told Consulate June 1 that if he was compelled to participate in the June 3 parliamentary adoption of the referendum results and Declaration of Independence, his party would disintegrate. As a result, the Serb nationalist parties would gain strength, moving closer to the Radicals. He reiterated that he has not joined the Serb nationalist parties (his referendum bloc allies) in rejecting the results, and instead said that the SNP acknowledges that the EU has recognized that Montenegro will be independent. He explicitly asked that the USG, and the rest of the international community, turn a blind eye to the absence of SNP from the upcoming June 3 parliamentary session, in order to preserve a civic opposition in Montenegro. He will also discuss this situation on June 2 with EU FM Solana. Bulatovic understood that the USG (and EU) cannot agree to his absence from the parliamentary session; what he sought was that his absence would not lead to a termination of dialogue between himself and the SNP, and the international community.

¶2. (SBU) Bulatovic noted that while the pro-Union bloc garnered 185,000 votes in the May 21 referendum, 184,000 of those came from ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins - no Bosniaks, Muslims, Albanians or Croats voted for Union. In other words, he added, 60 percent of Montenegro's Orthodox community voted for Union.

¶3. (SBU) He cautioned that Andrija Mandic, leader of the Serb People's Party (SNS) (note: almost equal in size to SNP) was increasingly headed in the direction of Seselj's Radicals, a move which would be destructive of the good ethnic relations prevailing in Montenegro. Without the SNP as an alternative, cautioned Bulatovic, Mandic's support could grow to 100,000 voters (out of a total electorate of 485,000), and create for the first time a large, nationalist opposition in Montenegro.

¶4. (SBU) Note: If the pro-union bloc entirely fails to appear for the June 3 session to formally adopt the referendum results, the GOM will likely rely on the 2002 Constitutional Court decision (Ref B) that a 2/3 majority vote in parliament is not required to ratify referendum results. End note.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Bulatovic is an intelligent politician who is trying, with some success, to remold his party as a civic party. As such, he is the only opposition political leader who has turned his back fully on the Serb

nationalism of the 1990s, in sharp contrast to his pro-Union allies. It should be noted that the SNP leadership benched the Radicals during the referendum campaign, at USG request (Ref C). While we (and the EU) cannot explicitly condone his planned absence, we agree with his analysis that his presence when the referendum result is ratified could be a serious blow to the SNP. Dialogue with Bulatovic and the SNP should continue at prior levels, so long as he does not join his erstwhile allies in rejecting the referendum results - a step he assured us he will not take.

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